How’s your life shaping up? Disappointing? Hard? Think for a moment about someone who has life a lot tougher than you. Introduce you to someone who has it worse:

* This man lived in the tombs (**v3**) – graveyard – literal
  + symbolic – dead existence, no life, joy, vitality.
* **v5** Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.
  + Randomly shouting out at people – probably heard similar – disturbed
  + Self-harm – one of two reasons:
    - To make them feel alive: dull, dark, lifeless world, pain makes them feel alive
    - To forget: drink, drugs, food - distraction
  + Day and night – sleepless – round & round tortured.
* Naked (**v15** – dressed and in his right mind)
* As a result, people had tried to help him – chained him up – stop self-harm
  + Out of control - For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. **(v4)**
  + no one could bind him anymore **(v3)** – given up. Only thing: isolation – leave him to it. Alone. No-one can help.
  + No one was strong enough to subdue him **(End v4)** – the power in him was stronger than the power anyone else had.
* Evil spirit – controlled by a force inside – so strong it dominated his thoughts, actions – stronger than anything or anyone outside.

All-in-all – awful life – think he could change himself?

* Utterly unable to change – hopeless.
* Show today: power of Jesus – he can do this – never beyond hope.

What would you do if you just met this guy?

* Me? Hide. Run away. Natural tendency.
  + Avoid – easier to ignore poor – broken – hurting – let someone else deal with it
  + Messy – will affect my job / family – I know this needs doing but someone else - I ignore it.
* Easy to do that in church life: jobs that need doing – someone else will do it. Drinks, cleaning, admin.

Jesus doesn’t ignore him - someone else to do it - gets right in there.

Jesus: ‘Come out of this man, you impure spirit!’ **(v8)** Something odd about that. Faced with a ranting, naked guy – homeless, living in a graveyard – self-harming – what would you do?

* Temptation is to deal with practical first.
  + Naked: clothes. Graveyard: home. Self-harm: counselling. Alone: friends.
* Jesus: spiritual first
  + Evil living inside you that needs to be removed. Why? Root cause of all the other problems.
    - Reason he was homeless: evil power in his heart
    - alone – bc impossible to live with – bc of evil pwr in heart
    - naked – torn clothes bc of
    - self-harm
  + spiritual problem at root.
  + Probably nothing else will change until root cause is fixed
  + Even if gets sorted – with this heart – sooner or later go wrong again
    - headed for hell – eternity w/o God.

Man – disabled 38yrs (John 5)

* Lying beside pool - grouchy bitter – no friends. Only hope: superstition about stirring of waters
* J heals him – walk: dashes off – no heart change
* J goes to find him – “stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” – what’s worse than disabled and friendless for 38 years? Eternity without God.
* Got to change inside as well as outside. Otherwise before: lame old man headed for hell before.
  + After: walking, old man headed for hell.

Paralysed man: 4 friends lower through roof – not walked for years.

Greatest need: stretcher – walk? No: “Your sins are forgiven”

What do we do with that?

Must remember the spiritual in our outreach.

* Want to help, bless people practically – of course.
* Greatest need – all ppl - know Jesus – sins forgiven
* Old life die – new life begin – repentance – new direction.

Does that mean: homeless guy turns up – let me read to you from John’s gospel.

* No – food, tea. Now, you’re in a church, tell me what do you know about J? Came to help all of us.

Charity giving: Relief?

* Xn – take gospel too. Greatest need of all ppl everywhere is to get right with G thru J.

Politics: can only do practical

* Let’s not expect too much of them – can’t fix root – our job – Jesus.

Tony: closest I’ve come to someone like this man.

* Prison: charity house – church: food, clothes – probation: course.
* Sold it all to buy drugs. Ended up living in a tent in a graveyard.
* Why? Heart unchanged – resisted J. Rather have my life than bow to him.

Rather have the mess – disaster that is my life – than come to J and be healed.

* So many living in a hole – make hole nice. Ignore the hand reaching down offering a hand up.
* Hand of J is there: offering hope – healing – forgiveness - new start.

J casts out demon from this man.

* Quick word about pigs – 1 homeless, self-harming man with no friends, everyone scared of – more valuable to J than a massive herd of pigs[[1]](#endnote-1)
  + Perspective on pets – Jesus’ take on animals – just saying.
* Result: “sitting there, dressed and in his right mind” (v15) – “normal” – healed.
* Still lots of problems: scars /friends /home. Good place to start making all those other things happen.

Missionary friends – Laos – no names:

* Woman in village: uncontrollably violent, randomly attacks ppl – tear clothes off
* Family > village spirit doctor > demon, won’t leave > find some Xns
* Team: praise – prayer – 2 demons come out
* Family: torment>joy. Came to J too.

Farm hands tending the pigs – run off to the village (v14 – not our fault guv)

Ppl went out to see what had happened.

* **v15** …they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were … afraid.
* You would think: bring out all the sick for healing: Doris - Dave. No.
* **v17** “leave our region” – get out – leave us alone

Becoming a Xn doesn’t always make life easier.

* Changes you – better person – fruit of Sp – better person.
* Something in the hearts of ppl that doesn’t like the light – afraid of the light – unknown power.
* Perhaps seen that? Family / friends / work – Xn – suspicion – cult. Come on!

What did J do about that problem?

* Man wants to go with J. (v18) but J refuses.
* Odd. When a bunch of demons ask – pigs – yes. Man: can I hang out with you: no. Why?
* **v19** Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’
* Mission: not hang out in a Xn clique the whole time /monastery
  + Your ppl are your primary mission field. Gentile – gentiles. Tell ppl like you what God has done in your life.
  + Grown up on Whitton – how J has changed you – most impact on Wh. Why? Your story is powerful – this person is like me – and look what happened to them.
  + In LG – who are “my people”? Who is God calling me to reach?
* So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were:- amazed.
* Fear -> amazed.
* Hang on in there.

So? Shared this passage – man – worst case scenario. Jesus brought hope to him – new life – start. Still in that same business.

* Plenty of people controlled by dark forces inside them – self-harming – self-medicating – plenty: alone – annoyed – mistakes. Plenty: society given up on. Plenty living among the tombs – focussed more on the dead than the living – looking back at the past – what was.
* Look what this man did: **v6** When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.
* What’s your response today? Who will heal your heart? Who are you relying on to give you a hope and a future? Who is going to deal with your sin? Who will break the chains that bind you to your past?
  + That man: broke any chains they put on him – but still totally chained up – totally controlled by this power inside.
* Jesus – freedom – break chains – start with new heart – comes in – love him. God did something so incredible that it would turn our hearts to him
* He chose to do something so extraordinary, amazing, unprecedented, captivatingly wonderful – capture the affections of our hearts – so incredible that when we saw it our hearts would be changed – our hearts would be renewed – unchain us forever.

**Isaiah 53:4**Surely [Jesus] took up our pain  
    and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
    stricken by him, and afflicted.

5But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
    he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
    and by his wounds we are healed.  
6We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
    each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
    the iniquity of us all.

* Our transgressions – law-breaking – failure – that’s what pierced him.
* Our iniquity – our sin – that crushed him.
* Our punishment – we deserve – on him – we get peace
* His wounds – our healing.

*My chains are gone, I've been set free,*

*My God, my Saviour has ransomed me.*

Encourage you today: flee to J – run to him. Everything in your heart will militate against it. Part of you will say no – I can do this – I’ll be OK – my resources are strong enough. J says “come”. Your heart will say, leave it for another day – delay – put it off. J says “come”.

**Sing: Water You Turned Into Wine**

Pray. Offering - Luke 4:18. **Sing: I Believe in Jesus**

1. c.f. Matt 10:31 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)